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ABSTRACT

In 1976, Nigeria made a commitment to giving its children six years of universal elementary education, in part to remedy regional imbalances in educational provision. Another objective was to promote children's view of themselves first as Nigerian citizens and then as members of tribal groups. Implementation of the plan encountered several problems, many related to the initial, serious underestimations of enrollment and costs. Although federal and state education statistics had been examined, and a survey of school inspectors had provided information on conditions in the schools, no study had focused on describing conditions as elementary school teachers experienced them. In an effort to remedy this situation, a total of 149 elementary school teachers in Nigeria were surveyed, and 96 were subsequently interviewed. The responses provide a portrait of universal elementary education midway through its second decade. Serious problems were found; one of these was the problem of underqualified teachers. Regional differences were not great, but problems continued to be greater in northern than in southern states. Improvements in supplies of teaching materials and in teachers' access to basic amenities were found. Teachers reported heavy use of memorization and recitation as teaching strategies. In general, high quality education has not accompanied large scale access to elementary education, but appears to be slowly developing. (RH)

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TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATUS OF NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Primary school teachers in Nigeria (n=149) were surveyed and then interviewed (n=96) to build a portrait of Universal Primary Education midway through its second decade. Serious problems were found, particularly that of underqualified teachers, although an overall increase in teachers' qualifications was reported. Regional differences were not large but problems continued to be greater in northern states. Improvements in supplies of teaching materials and in teachers' access to basic amenities as compared to earlier studies were found. Teachers reported heavy use of memorization and recitation as a teaching strategy. Quality education has not accompanied large scale access to primary education but appears to be developing slowly.

In 1976 Nigeria committed itself to the provision of universal primary education (UPE) to its children. A basic, six-year level of education was seen as a means of creating unity between the many disparate groups making up Nigeria's citizenry. It was also seen as a means of working towards the equalization of educational opportunities throughout the nation by providing a minimum level to which all children would be educated (Ozigi & Ocho, 1981; Adesina, 1982). The national commitment to UPE was endorsed by many, although not all, Nigerians (Csapo, 1983, 1981).

A large commitment of money and the endorsement of many Nigerians was not enough to prevent a multitude of problems as UPE was put in place. The program has been a success in that many millions of children have received a primary education. However, a low quality of education was noted as an accompaniment to quantity education (Bray, 1981). A survey of inspectors responsible for primary schools completed a decade after the initiation of UPE suggested that conditions in primary education were continuing to be such that quality education was difficult to obtain (Sunal, Osa, Gaba, & Saleemi, 1989). While some data is available describing primary schooling under the UPE program, little data is available from the teachers directly involved in it.

The experience of primary school teachers as they, themselves, perceive and report it has not been documented.

Background

Universal Primary Education was designed to educate children between ages 6-12. It resulted from a recognition that those receiving a primary education tended to be male, urban, well-to-do and resident in a southern or western state in Nigeria. These educational imbalances were thought to increase the stresses already experienced by a nation with over 200 ethnic groups speaking many languages and practicing Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions. It was thought that education could promote children's view of themselves as a Nigerian citizen first and then a member of an ethnic group. It could also equalize opportunities as citizens all received a basic level of education (Fafunwa, 1982; Ozigi & Ocho, 1981).

Csapo (1983, 1981), Wilson (1978) and Urwick (1983) described problems which occurred in the first few years after UPE was initiated. These included an initial serious underestimation of enrollment. A second problem related to the large enrollment of children in UPE was the need for huge expenditures of money, much more than had been estimated. Although large amounts of money were spent, with education expenditures ranking first in state and second in federal budgets, still there was underfinancing. Third, a

lower percentage of northern children were enrolled continuing earlier imbalances.

A later study (Sunal, et. al., 1989) described conditions in primary schools a decade into UPE as reported by 147 school inspectors. While conditions existed which limited the quality of primary education some positive change seemed to be occurring. In this study inspectors described training and living conditions of their teachers and conditions of schools and supplies. These inspectors noted crowding resulting in some classes being taught outdoors, a great shortage of textbooks and basic teaching aids, the presence of many teachers who did not meet minimum qualifications, and a lack of basic amenities such as access to health care resulting in difficult living conditions for many teachers. They also noted larger numbers of qualified teacher's college graduates beginning careers by teaching in the primary schools and continuing large portions of state and federal budgets being assigned to education. While the inspectors' reports were often negative they also suggested that quality education did occur in some settings, that a cadre of trained teachers was developing and that the potential for quality mass primary education did exist.

While federal and state education statistics have been examined in studies and a survey of school inspectors has reported on conditions in primary schools, no study has focused on describing conditions as primary school teachers

themselves experience them. There is a need to explore the perceptions of those who are teaching, to report their descriptions of their qualifications and living conditions and conditions in their schools as they encounter them on a daily basis. Earlier studies have moved from using government statistics to using the reports of those who supervise a number of primary schools. Such studies give an overview. It is important to move closer in, to report what those directly involved on a daily basis in primary school teaching experience. Such information will contribute to the development of a portrait of Nigerian universal primary education midway into its second decade.

The purpose of this study was to use survey and interview methodology to construct a portrait describing the status of primary education in Nigeria during its second decade. The study was concerned with the problem of identifying those portions of the educational process in which quality education was continuing or evolving despite the stresses imposed by quantity education and limited financing. This study focused on the question, "What is the status of Nigerian primary education during its second decade from the viewpoint of primary education teachers?" A second related question was "What needs and potentials are evident in Nigerian primary education from the reports of primary teachers?" In order to consider these questions, specific areas were addressed in the study:

1. How adequate were primary classrooms?
2. How adequate were supplies of teaching aids and materials?
3. How adequate was the level of teacher training?
4. What was occurring in terms of basic teaching practice?
5. How adequate were teacher living conditions?

These questions address areas that directly determine quality of education in practice. The fifth area addressed, teacher living conditions, has an indirect rather than direct impact. For example, a teacher without housing available near the school, and living far from school may spend a large part of the day in travel particularly if means of transportation are scarce and haphazard. As a result there may be little energy left over for planning and the teacher may be often late to class.

Methodology

Subjects

The study surveyed 149 primary school teachers in 19 of the 21 Nigerian states. Of the teachers surveyed, 65% (n=96) were also interviewed. There were 98 male (67%) and 49 female (33%) teachers. This was representative of Nigerian primary schools where, nationally, male teachers predominate. The average age of the teachers was 27 with a range from 16 through 49. A slight majority of the teachers (n=79, 54%) were native Hausa speakers from the

northern third of the country. The rest (n=70) represented a mixture of 23 different languages with Yoruba (n=21, 30%) and Ibo (n=19, 27%) predominating among this group. Among the non-Hausa speakers 56% represented states in the western third of the nation and 44% represented states in the southern third. Islam was the religion of 60% (n=88) of the teachers, while 37% (n=55) were Christian and 3% (n=4) followed traditional religions. These teachers represented the diversity present among Nigerians. They also represented the predominance of the northern Hausa people who form a slight majority of the population. The group is somewhat skewed, however, towards the followers of Islam.

These teachers came from families with low educational levels, 20% of their fathers and 30% of their mothers had no formal education while 58% of their fathers and 44% of their mothers had one year of schooling. Only 5% of their fathers and 2% of their mothers had a six-year primary school education. These teachers had taught for an average of 7 years although 38 had taught for just one year and 2 had taught for as long as 32 years. They taught an average of 34 students with a range of 8 to 61.

Initial selection of teachers was made through contact with the Faculties of Education at two universities, one in the north and one in the south. Lecturers at those universities served as contact persons for the teachers, who were subsequently chosen at random. The Primary Education

Survey (PES) was hand delivered and individually discussed with each teacher. Versions of the instrument were available in Hausa, Arabic, English, Yoruba and Ibo. Responses were received from 147 of the 175 (84%) teachers contacted. The interviews were conducted by university faculty members and were tape recorded.

Instrument

The Primary Education Survey, an instrument used previously in a survey of primary school inspectors (Sunal, et. al., 1989) was used in the study. It contained 86 questions including 55 multiple-choice and 31 short-answer questions grouped by major areas related to the research questions. In addition, 96 of the teachers were interviewed using key questions related to the areas surveyed. The interviews were used as a check on survey results and to obtain a greater depth of information. Quality education was considered in terms of adequacy of facilities, availability of instructional materials, adequacy of teachers' training, teaching practice, and adequacy of teachers' living conditions. The data collected were subjected to cross-tabular analysis.

Results

The results of the study are reported in five categories corresponding to the research questions. These are: school facilities, teaching materials, teacher

qualifications, teaching practice and quality of the teacher's life.

School Facilities

The study surveyed primary school needs in regard to the provision of basic classroom facilities and furniture (Table 1). Most teachers felt crowded (73%, n=109). They wanted more classroom space and preferably more classrooms in their schools. There was little difference between teachers from northern (71%, n=56) and other parts of the country (76%, n=52) contrary to the Sunal et. al. (1989) study which reported greater needs in the north. The classrooms they taught in had often had been built after the UPE program was begun (68%) and so were less than fifteen years old. However, they were in disrepair because of a lack of maintenance funds in local education authority budgets and because of poor decisions in determining materials to be used in their initial construction. Nearly all teachers interviewed (96%, n=143) reported that the windows in their classrooms were broken out because of damage during storms and that there was no money for replacement. They (74%, n=71) also felt that replacement was probably not a good idea since they would only get broken again. A better idea was the use of shutters, curtains and other indigenous design strategies which could more easily be maintained and which took into account local weather and other factors. Most teachers interviewed (81%,

n=120) also reported that one third of their student desks and chairs were broken. Many of these could be repaired locally but there was no money for repairs. As a result students doubled up and sometimes tripled up in a seat. Most teachers reported having electricity in their schools (86%, n=128). However, because of inadequate national generating capacity and resulting power sharing, schools were usually without electricity.

Teaching Aids and Materials

Some teaching materials are considered basic to education (Table 1). These range from chalk to maps and textbooks. Less than half (47%, n=70) of the teachers reported that their students had textbooks. Textbooks were mostly (87%, n=128) purchased by the student's family. Significantly more ($F=6.69$, $p<.01$) southern and western teachers reported their students as having textbooks (59%, n=41) than did northern teachers (37%, n=29). The textbooks students had were not all the same representing different series and availability in bookstores. Homework was not assigned in these texts because of their diversity and because not all students had access to them. Textbooks were viewed primarily as a support at home in studying for classwork.

Teachers did not always have a textbook to use as they planned and taught. Most had a copy of a mathematics textbook (75%, n=112), while 43% (n=64) had a social studies

textbook and 37% (n=55) reported having a science textbook. Fewer teachers in the north reported having textbooks ($F=6.23$, $p<.01$). For example, 69% (n=54) of northern and 80% (n=54) of southern teachers reported having a mathematics textbook.

Teaching was based on the national syllabus for each content area. The major content areas include mathematics, science, social studies, religious knowledge (Christian or Islamic), language arts, arts and crafts, and physical education. The syllabus was supplemented in some states by activities designed by the Ministry of Education to expand the it. The syllabus was quite detailed and most teachers (71%, n=104) reported trying to follow it. However, teachers interviewed (82%, n=78) reported difficulty in following the syllabus because of a lack of texts and other support materials.

Among classroom materials, 69% (n=103) reported a good supply of chalk. Those having some or no chalk coped by taking up collections from student families and/or paying for it themselves. Only 14% (n=21) reported having no maps in the school while 48% (n=72) reported having four or more available. There were significantly more ($F=1.42$, $p<.05$) maps available in northern schools. Some other teaching aids were available for 44% (n=66), while 36% (n=54) reported having few or none available. In some schools (21%, n=31) many teaching aids were available. About half of the

teachers reported that the local education authority did not provide writing materials for them to use in planning and teaching (51%, n=76). These teachers were more likely to be in southern and western areas of the country ($F=2.95$, $p<.01$). Teachers reported that most of their students typically brought writing materials such as exercise notebooks to class (89%, n=133).

Teacher Qualifications

The educational requirement for primary school teachers has been the Grade II teacher's certificate. This certificate has been obtained through completing the course of study in a teacher's college, a secondary school preparing primary school teachers in a five year course of study equivalent to grades 7-11. Currently secondary schooling is moving to a six year program equivalent to grades 7-12, however graduates of this extended program are not yet available. Since 1981 the federal government has indicated that it will work toward the goal of having all primary school teachers obtain the National Certificate of Education (NCE) (Nigeria, 1981). This is achieved by completing a two year postsecondary program at an Advanced Teacher's College and is equivalent to the normal school programs once found in the United States. In this study 86% (n=128) had completed a Grade II teacher preparation program, a much higher percentage than had been reported in an earlier study (61%) by Sunal et. al. (1989). The NCE was

held by 9% (n=13). Among northern teachers 81% (n=64) had completed the Grade II course of study as compared to 90% (n=63) of teachers from the south and west. Seven (5%), all from the north, had certification at the Grade III level, representing a program no longer in existence which required a junior high school level of training. This would indicate that most held acceptable levels of training. However, of those at the Grade II level, 48% (n=61) had not passed their Grade II examinations. Of these, significantly more (63%, n=38) were from the north ($F=5.43$, $p<.05$). These were recognized as Grade II "failed" teachers in contrast to Grade II "passed" teachers. Of those who had failed the exam, 11% (n=7) intended to retake it until they passed it. Half (54%) of those who had passed the exam had done so on their first try. Another 32% had done so on their second try. Grade II failed teachers were allowed to teach because of a continuing shortage of fully qualified primary school teachers, however they were paid less than Grade II passed teachers. The Grade II qualification was considered sufficient for primary school teaching by 70% (104) of the teachers.

In interviews, many teachers mentioned that they were among the first in their family to be educated. They thought primary school teaching was a respected position, though it did not command the respect of secondary school teaching. When completing their own primary schooling they

had been unaware of most occupations possible with advanced education. Most had been only familiar with teaching or civil service as possibilities for an individual with secondary schooling. They felt that they had been among the better students during their own primary school days. They did not feel as competent in their secondary schooling and had not done well enough on exams to enter secondary schools such as the science secondary schools which were more demanding than the teachers colleges. About 30% (n=29) hoped to attend the Advanced Teachers College and eventually teach at the secondary school level because they would earn more money and have greater respect.

The federal government has indicated that primary school teachers should be inserviced regularly to improve the quality of their preparation (Nigeria, 1981). However, 42% (n=63) of these teachers said they had never participated in an inservice. Partially this figure can be accounted for the the number of first and second year teachers in the sample. The mean reported by the whole group was one inservice experience every two years. Some reported a range of up to nine years (13%, n=19) between inservice experiences. Generally inservices were held in a central location within a state, often in the capital. Teachers gathered there and typically spent a full day for five days at the inservice. Their costs were paid for by the local education authority. Those who had attended

inservices reported overly large working groups with a shortage of materials (62%, n=66). One example was given of a science materials inservice designed to help teachers make basic equipment out of local materials which they could take back to school with them. Included in this equipment were meter sticks and liquid measurement containers. The working groups were made up of eighteen people who gathered around a table and had just one saw, hammer, etc. per group. Only enough material was available to make eight sets of materials. Material had been ordered but had not arrived. While the content of the workshop was appropriate, problems with transportation and communication had resulted in only a part of the materials needed being available. It was not possible to pick up a telephone and call the supplier to speed up delivery, since telephones did not often work. Although the inservice did not work as planned the teacher reported that he had picked up a lot of ideas and had been able to have local craftsmen make some of the material for his students. Unfortunately, he felt limited because he had no models to show local craftsmen, nor had he been able to do much of the work and so did not know how to make everything himself.

Teaching Practice

The teachers reported that they most often used memorization and recitation (61%, n=91) in teaching. They also thought these were the strategies most used by primary

school teachers (63%, n=94). Other types of strategies such as discussion were reported by a small percentage of the teachers. Most (56%, n=83) thought students should have and use textbooks all the time while 31% (n=46) thought they were generally not useful.

Homework was given every day or nearly every day by 57% (n=85) while 20% (n=30) rarely if ever gave homework. Fewer teachers in the north (44%, n=35) than in other parts of the country (72%, n=50) gave homework ($F=10.01$, $p>.01$). Most teachers (80%, n=119) thought other primary school teachers gave homework regularly. The homework typically involved memorization of material to be recited in class the following day.

During teaching no teacher reported usually having plans prepared and using those plans. Plans were sometimes developed by 72% (n=107) while 28% (n=42) never planned. Teachers in the south and west (79%, n=54) planned more than did teachers in the north (68%, n=54) ($F=3.99$, $p>.05$). Those who planned spent an average of ninety minutes per week in planning. Planning time ranged from zero to six hours weekly.

Teacher's Quality of Life

Most teachers walked to school (59%, n=88). Another 22%, (n=33) rode a bus. A bicycle or motorbike were used by 14% (n=21) to get to school while 5% (n=8) drove a car. Most teachers (59%, n=88) lived within two kilometers of

their school. None reported living more than four kilometers away. Some teachers (21%, n=31), most of whom were from the north (69%) reported being provided with a house near the school. Transportation was a problem for those who depended on a bus. As a result, they were often late to school. Such problems were reported as increasing. Because of a limited availability of foreign exchange, parts for buses are becoming scarce and expensive resulting in a declining number of buses being available. National financial difficulties due to a continuing decline in oil revenues and to a dependency on those revenues has also meant a lack of increase in teachers' salaries to keep up with inflation. As a result teachers cannot purchase a bicycle or other means of transportation nor can they always afford parts needed to keep bicycles or vehicles in usable condition.

Most teachers (80%, n=119) thought their salary, about one-third that of secondary school teachers, was insufficient for their needs. Many of those interviewed referred to the inflation of prices for food, cloth and other necessities. Their cost of living has increased substantially but their salaries have not kept pace with this increase. They reported usually being paid on time. Sometimes state governments withheld their salaries when funds were short but this occurrence was reported to have decreased in recent years.

A majority of teachers had electricity in their homes (57%, n=85) however it was not often operating. Water was available most often by pipe, then by purchase, less often from wells, and least often directly from the river (Table 2). Half (51%, n=75) thought health care was easily available to them. Hospital care (including outpatient care) was most available (Table 2). Differences were evident between the north and other parts of the country with a higher level of care available to teachers in the north ($F=3.13$, $p<.05$).

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study indicate that the serious problems reported in earlier studies continue to exist in primary education in Nigeria midway through its second decade. The study also confirms that a few differences exist between various sections of the country. These are found, most importantly, in the continuing greater numbers of underqualified teachers found in the north. Overall, more problems are reported by these teachers in the north than in other areas of the country.

While serious problems continue to be found, positive change is also occurring. Most importantly, a greater percentage of qualified teachers was found in this study in all areas of the country than had been found in the Sunal et. al. (1989) study which described the status of primary education at the end of the first decade of UPE. This study

found a smaller need for textbooks, teaching aids, and basic furniture than had been reported in earlier studies. The study also found some improvement in teachers' personal access to electricity, clean water, and health care with somewhat better access in the north than in other areas of the country.

Basic needs exist in school facilities and furnishings. No teacher reported having to teach outdoors, a complete lack of facilities. However, crowding and deteriorating facilities seem to be the norm. Teachers have ideas regarding how improvements could be made. A recent development originating in northern states has been the initiation of primary school management boards at the state level. These boards are charged with the maintenance and improvement of primary education. Since their focus is specifically on primary education, they have greater contact with teachers and schools than has previously occurred. They may be able to utilize the ideas primary teachers have. Since many underqualified teachers are in these classrooms there is not much likelihood that these negative factors will be offset by skilled teaching so it is important to listen to the ideas teachers do have and to implement those with potential.

These teachers have reported a larger number of Grade II qualifications than has been previously found. It appears that a cadre of trained teachers is beginning to

emerge. As this occurs, higher quality education is possible. Inservicing is necessary but is still at a low level. However, this study reports more frequent inservicing than had been found earlier. It also suggests that a less than optimal inservice experience has some positive effects. The greater amount of inservicing suggested by this study indicates there is potential for upgrading of teachers.

Teachers in this study typically had parents who were uneducated. They represent the first generation with education. It appears that primary school teaching is the first profession for many Nigerians who obtain secondary schooling as it has been for many in Western countries. Because of the lower status and salaries reported by these teachers, it is not likely that primary school teaching will be the occupation of choice when another opportunity presents itself. The better qualified teachers are likely to try to move into secondary school teaching, as was indicated by some of those interviewed in the study, or to move into another occupation. The country's continuing financial problems have limited opportunities outside education for many. Limited opportunities and the increasing number of individuals with secondary school and higher education will continue to result in better-qualified individuals entering and staying in primary school teaching for some time.

There are indications that teachers' quality of life is improving through the provision of services such as hospital care and electricity. Unfortunately, teachers also report insufficient salaries and inflation resulting in difficulties with providing for basic needs. Financial difficulties may cause teachers to spend increasing amounts of time in enterprises which supplement their incomes.

These teachers did report limited planning for teaching. They also reported heavy use of memorization and recitation. These are strategies requiring limited teacher preparation. The limited planning and emphasis on memorization and recitation may partly be due to time limitations resulting from income producing activities other than teaching. Another factor is lack of skill. Underqualified teachers may not have the skills necessary to use other, more creative, teaching strategies. The use of memorization and recitation as a teaching strategy also reflects tradition. Finally, another influence supporting this strategy is the limited availability of textbooks and teaching aids. With limited availability of materials teachers, particularly those who are underqualified, are likely to resort to memorization and recitation. Utilizing other strategies requires skill and the commitment of large amounts of time for planning and developing resource materials.

Universal Primary Education is no longer in its initiation period. Teachers directly involved in it report chronic problems. They also report some positive change. The quantity education represented by UPE has not provided quality education for most children. Nigerians recognize these problems and demonstrate concern over them. The recent development of primary school management boards indicates a recognition of the need to improve primary education and a willingness to try to address the needs which exist. This study indicates that the primary teacher during the second decade of UPE is more qualified than during the first decade. The teaching environment is limiting in terms of facilities and materials but some positive change has occurred. Quality education has not been accomplished but it appears to be developing slowly.

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